Edmund B. Willson

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A

SERMON

PREACHED IN GRAFTON, SUNDAY, DECEMBER 27, 1846;

CONTAINING

HISTORICAL NOTICES

OF THE

Congregational Church

IN SAID TOWN.

By EDMUND B. WILLSON,
Minister of the Congregational Church and Society.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE SOCIETY.

WORCESTER:
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1847.

GRAFTON, MARCH 10, 1847.

REV. E. B. WILLSON,

DEAR SIR :

At a legal meeting held this day, of the Congregational Society, the undersigned were chosen a Committee for the purpose of requesting a copy of the Sermon preached by you, of the history of the Congregational Church and Society of this Town, for the purpose of having it printed.

Respectfully, your Obedient Servants,

JOSEPH BRUCE,
H. H. W. SIGOURNEY,
SAMUEL WOOD.

GRAFTON, MARCH 12, 1847.

MESSRS. JOSEPH BRUCE, H. H. W. SIGOURNEY, and SAMUEL WOOD,

GENTLEMEN :—

I have your note requesting a Copy of the Sermon which I lately preached, giving the history of the Congregational Church in this place.

I can readily understand the desire of the Church and Society to preserve all that can be gathered up on this subject, however incomplete or drily detailed.

I will soon place a copy of the Sermon at your disposal.

With much respect, yours,

E. B. WILLSON.

SERMON.

MATT. XIII: 31. . The Kingdom of Heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed.

It was on the 28th of December, 1731, Old Style, (corresponding to the 8th of the following month according to the New Style,) that the First Congregational Church was gathered in this place. Only a few days therefore are wanting to bring us to the one hundred and fifteenth anniversary of its organization. As this is the last Sabbath of the year, a fit time to turn to the past for instruction, I shall take this opportunity to commemorate the planting of this church by giving an outline of its history.

Some may have a curiosity to learn why this is made the occasion for a commemorative discourse, since it is more usual to select the end of a century, or half century, as the most appropriate time for such historical retrospections.

It would be a sufficient reason for doing what I propose, that no time is unsuitable for paying a tribute of grateful respect to the memory of the men of pious heart who laid the deepest foundation of our Christian institutions—that no time is too late nor too early to be taught by their examples and experience. Another and sufficient reason is, that it has not been done, so far as I am aware, before. But that which has most influenced me to attempt it is, that I have recently for the first time obtained access to the early records of this church. From these records I have supposed it would be interesting to you to hear, as they have been for several years withheld not only from the possession, but even from the inspection, of the members of this church, to whom they legally, and, as I conceive, rightfully belong.* I have therefore endeavored to embody in my present discourse, such important facts as I could glean from these ancient registers, connecting with them such other matter as

* See Appendix, A.

I have been able to collect from other sources, as might serve to illustrate the history of the Church.

A history of the first Congregational Church in this place—known as The Congregational Church—should embrace the ecclesiastical history of the town, for about the space of forty years from the time of its settlement. For nearly that length of time this was the only Church in the town, the town itself being the only religious society or parish. It was about the year 1774, that a second Church was formed, composed of Baptists.* Down to this period therefore, the history we trace is, in fact, the religious history of the town.

But our ecclesiastical record of the olden time would be incomplete, should we pass without notice a church which had not only been planted here before the formation of this church, but which at so early a period had had its growth and its decline also. Indeed I have not spoken with literal exactness, in saying that this was the *first* Congregational Church here gathered. More than sixty years before the founding of this, another had been regularly embodied, though it had but a brief existence. It was composed exclusively of the native inhabitants of the country, and was the second of the Indian churches organized by the Rev. John Eliot, of Roxbury, and his co-adjutors.

It was about the year 1646, and when he was about forty-two years of age, that Eliot, generally known as 'the Apostle to the Indians,' conceived the purpose of civilizing and evangelizing the natives of New-England.† He set about this work with earnestness and faith. He undertook to gather them into permanent settlements, to teach them the arts of domestic life, and to establish among them schools and churches. The first church of the kind was formed by him at Natic in the year 1660. The second was formed at Hassanamesit,‡ as this place was then called, in the sum-

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* See Appendix, B.

† Gookin, 1 Mass. Hist. Col. I, 168.

‡ 'The name signifieth,' says Gookin, 'a place of small stones.' When the town was afterwards bought by English proprietors, it went by the name of Hassanamisco. Whether the change of termination changed its signification or not, we are unable to say. Eliot, in his 'Indian Grammar Begun,' gives '*hassun*' as the Indian word for *stone*, and adds that diminutives are formed by adding '*es* or *emes*' to the primitive nouns, giving '*hassunemes*' as the diminutive of *hassun*. The final syllable may have contained the idea of place.

mer of the year 1671.* I do not find any authority which states positively that Eliot organized this church in person; though I think there can scarcely be a doubt that this was the case. He must have visited this place many times. There was no one else to whom he would have been likely to entrust so important a business, in an enterprise which devolved almost wholly upon himself. What seems conclusive is, that he wrote a circumstantial account of the gathering of this particular church to the Corporation formed in London for promoting the Gospel among the Indians, which he probably would not have done, if he had not himself been a witness of it, and instrumental in it. It is not known that this account was ever published, although it was the intention of the writer that it should be.† In a letter subsequently written by Eliot, in which he refers to that account, he says that the manner of 'inchurching' the Indians was 'the same (so near as we can) that is practiced in gathering churches among the English.' They were 'all furnished with the customary officers, saving the church at Natic,' where it was wisely thought that no officers were needed, so long as John Eliot lived to be their teacher and pastor. The Sacrament was administered by their pastors in the usual form. The same discipline and ordinances were practiced among them, as in the English Congregational churches at that time. Candidates for admission, before they were received, were 'diligently instructed and examined both publickly and privately in the Catechism, their blameless and pious conversation was publickly testified, their names were publickly exposed as desireing to make confession and join unto the church.' They and their children, 'if not upgrown,' were baptised. If the children were upgrown, they made their own confession, and were baptised on their own account.‡ They assembled to their Sabbath worship 'twice a day, in the morning and afternoon, at the sound of a drum—for bells they yet had not.' The services were conducted in an order very similar to that now observed in most of our Congregational churches. They began with 'solemn and affectionate prayer,' offered by their teacher. After a short pause, a chapter was read out of the Old or New Testament, either by the teacher 'or some other there-

* 1 Mass. Hist. Col. I, 185.
† Ibid X, 124.
‡ Eliot's Letter, 1 Mass. Hist. Col. X, 124-5-6.

unto appointed.' 'At the conclusion thereof, a psalm or part of a psalm was appointed, rehearsed, and solemnly sung. Then the minister catechised and prayed before his sermon; and so preached from some text of Scripture. Then concluded with prayer and a psalm and a blessing pronounced.' When in their houses of worship, 'the men-kind sat apart by themselves and the women-kind by themselves, according to their age, quality and degree.' Their teachers were generally chosen from among themselves, 'of the most pious and able men among them.'* In the beginning of Eliot's undertaking, before he had qualified some of the natives themselves to impart religious instruction, and while as yet he was himself their principal teacher, there was another important feature in their meetings. After he had prayed and preached briefly,† he 'admitted the Indians to propound questions touching something then spoken, or some other matter in religion tending to their illumination.' And this questioning and answering formed no inconsiderable or uninteresting part of the exercises, for we are told by the historian, that 'divers of them had a faculty to frame hard and difficult questions.'‡ To this point, however, we do not need the historian's testimony, for many of these questions have been preserved, and are sufficient witnesses to their possession of this power. We find them, for example, propounding such questions as these, which we have taken almost at random. 'Why did not God give all men good hearts that they might be good?' 'Why doth God punish in hell forever?' 'And if they repent in hell, why will not God let them out again?' 'Why did not God kill the Devil, that made all men so bad, God having all the power?' 'I see why I must fear hell and do so every day; but why must I fear God?' 'In wicked dreams, doth the soul sin?' Hard, we have no doubt, the teacher found it to give answers to some of these questions satisfactory to the inquirers; happy indeed if he could answer them altogether to his own satisfaction.

We know not the number of members originally collected into this church; but three years after its organization, it was said to contain about sixteen men and women who lived in the town, be-

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* Gookin, 1 Mass. Hist. Col. I, 183.

† This brief preaching, as it was considered, we find was 'about three quarters of an hour.'

‡ 1 Mass. Hist. Col. I, 168, 9.

sides several others that lived in other places. There were about thirty baptised persons in the town, all the inhabitants being computed at about twelve families of sixty souls. The pastor of the church at that time was one Joseph Tackuppawillin, who is described as 'a pious and able man, and apt to teach.' His father, whose name was Naoas, 'a grave and sober Christian,' was deacon of the church. A brother of the pastor, much noted as an assistant of Eliot in printing his Indian Bible, and who was called James the Printer, or James Printer, from the circumstance of his understanding the art of printing, then lived in the town. The ruling elder, was one of the most distinguished of the early Indian converts, by name Piambow, or Piambohou. A sketch of a sermon or exhortation delivered by this man, before he became an officer in the Hassanamesit Church, is extant. It was delivered on a Fast Day at Natic in 1658.* He expounded the beatitudes in Matt. v, and so far as we can judge from this mere outline of his discourse, he was a man of intelligence, and was capable of interpreting Scripture with a very good understanding of its spirit and meaning. He came from Natic at the gathering of this church to be its ruling elder, and when the inhabitants of the town were dispersed in the war with Philip, he returned to Natic, where he died.† The prospects of the church at this time (1674) were highly encouraging. They had a meeting-house built after the English fashion.‡ A school had been established, and was flourishing. Natives were here prepared for teaching and preaching Christianity. Several settlements of Chistianized Indians in the neighborhood had been already provided with teachers from this place. The preachers in four 'praying towns' of the vicinity, it is said, expressly went from Hassanamesit, where they were probably educated.§ Many others, without doubt, were here taught, who became missionaries to their brethren.

But the benevolent hopes, which the venerable apostle to the Indians and the friends who had joined him in his philanthropic labors

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* Eliot's 'Epitomy' of the different discourses on that occasion, sent to the London Corporation.

† 1 Mass. Hist. Col. IX, 198.

‡ I can find no tradition as to the place where this house stood.

§ Chabanakongkomun, now Dudley,—Wabquisset, in Woodstock, Ct.—Packachoag, partly in Worcester and partly in Auburn,—Waentug, Uxbridge.

were now so confidently cherishing, were soon to be blasted. The war between Philip and the English colonists broke out the following year. These 'praying' Indians became objects of jealousy and suspicion to both parties. They were tampered with by their countrymen, and suspected and oppressed by the whites. The town was broken up and the church scattered. The worthy Gookin, the friend and helper of Eliot, gives us a melancholy picture of the sufferings and aggravated wrongs heaped upon the Christian Indians, many of whom were not ill-disposed towards the white settlers. Every piece of mischief that was done, whose author was not known, was ascribed to them. Tackuppawillin, the Pastor, suffered exceedingly. He was at first drawn or driven off with others to Philip's side, though he went reluctantly, 'with heavy heart and weeping.' He soon after made an attempt to escape to the English. In the attempt he fell into the hands of one of their parties prematurely, and was treated by them with great barbarity. They robbed him of everything he had, even to a pewter drinking cup which had been given him by Mr. Eliot to use in administering the sacrament. 'O, Sir,' said he, when Mr. Eliot came to see him in Boston, 'I am greatly distressed this day on every side. The English have taken away some of my estate, my corn, cattle, plough, cart, chain and other goods. The enemy Indians have also taken a part of what I had. The wicked Indians mock and scoff at me, saying, Now what is become of your praying to God?' The English called him a hypocrite. His family had been driven away from him through fear of the English. It seemed indeed true, when he said in his distress, that he had 'nowhere to look but up to God in heaven to help him.'* His faith in the Englishman's God did not fail him, however, even when Englishmen themselves became his enemies and oppressors. Who could have been surprised at the apostacy, if it had failed him?

In the spring of 1677, the war being ended, some of the Indians came back to Hassanamesit. 'But not long after they withdrew from thence, and gave over tending their corn for fear of the Maquas.'† There is no reason to suppose that the scattered church

* Hist. of Christian Indians in Transactions of the American Antiquarian Society, Vol. II, p. 504, &c.

† Ibid. 519. In 1684, there was no regular meeting here for worship on the Sabbath. 1 M. H. Col. III, 188.

was ever re-assembled after the war. We find in 1698 that five families had returned, 'unto whom James Prinler [Printer] stood related as teacher.'* Mention has already been made of this Printer, as the brother of the pastor, and the assistant of Eliot in printing his Bible. There may have been in these five families some who had before been members of the church; and the Christian ordinances may have been kept up among them. But if the church, as such, had any existence after its unfortunate dispersion, we know not that any account of it has been preserved.

We are admonished by a glance at the wide field that lies before us not to linger for remark. Could we do so, we should find a fertile subject in the character and efforts of that distinguished Christian, who with so large a measure of the apostolic spirit, cheerfully resigned every pursuit promising preferment, reputation, or ease, many of which his talents and learning opened to him, that he might at the expense of sacrifices, exposure, and pains, carry the gospel to the poor. But leaving this ancient church, the foregoing notice of which we hope will not be deemed out of place, nor irrelevant to our main subject, we proceed to that which is more immediately and especially the topic of the occasion.

It was in the spring of 1728, that this town, then called Hassanamisco, was purchased of the Indians by forty English proprietors. The General Court of Massachusetts, in granting these proprietors leave to effect the purchase, made it a condition, that within three years they should build a meeting house and school-house, and settle 'a learned orthodox minister;' and that they 'should constantly maintain, and duly support, a minister and school-master among them:'—all this to be done without charge to the Indians, though the benefits of the school and ministry were to be shared by them equally with the whites.†

The purchase of the town was made on the 19th of March, 1728. The first meeting of the proprietors was held in Marlborough on the the 9th of April following. The first vote, passed after they had organized, was to choose a committee 'to take a survey of the Plantation of Hassanamisco, * * * to find out the centre plot of

* Rawson & Danforth's account, 1 M. H. Col. X, 131.

† Proprietors' Records.

the Plantation.' The next vote was, that ' the meeting-house should be placed and set up at or upon the centre of the said Plantation, in case the land at the centre be accommodable ; otherwise at the nearest accommodable place to the centre.' The second meeting was held here at the house of Nehemiah How, on the 19th of April. When the meeting had been duly organized, it was voted to adjourn to the centre of the land to fix upon a spot for the erection of the meeting-house. Upon viewing the place said to be the centre, it was not found suitable for the purpose. This was a spot lying a little to the south, and about twenty-five or thirty rods easterly from where we now are, and where the land probably was thought to be too low and moist. A spot of ground was then viewed ' westerly therefrom, upon the northerly end of a hill called by the Indians Assawossachasuck.' That could not have been far from the place occupied by this house—a little to the west and south. Still another place was afterward viewed and finally fixed upon, a little way southward of this last. That, you are aware, was the site from which the old meeting-house was removed a few years since.*

Thus we see these grave pioneers, cherishing the same religious zeal which characterized the primitive colonists of New England, making it their first care to provide for the worship of God. Their *first* vote at their *first* meeting relates to the selection of a proper situation for the house of prayer. Their second meeting was here in the very wilderness itself, as it then was, whither they had come to consummate this vote. We seem to see them now, a little company of less than half a hundred, passing about among the tall forest trees, which stood all over these places that are now covered with human habitations. They are asking where shall be laid the foundations of a Christian temple, before yet the worshippers are come, whose prayers and solemn praise are to consecrate it. Their own dwellings are not yet to be seen. The stakes are not set to mark the places where they are soon to rise. These things are to come after. Their Sabbath home first—their week-day tents in good time. To-day the wants of the soul—to-morrow the needs of the

* Proprietors' Records. This meeting-house, built by the Proprietors, still stands on the western line of the Common. It was removed from the centre of the Common when it ceased to be used as a house of worship.

body. Just one month from the day on which the 'Plantation' was bought of the Indians, the place for the meeting-house was decided upon. It was voted, on the next July, to have a meeting-house built and finished at or before November 1, 1730, thus allowing nearly two years and a half for the work. Its dimensions were—length 50 feet, width 40 feet, height 22 feet, 'between joynts.'*

At a meeting of the Proprietors held March 31, 1730, it was voted, 'to continue the preaching of the Gosple at Hassanamisco;' from which it appears, that they had begun to have preaching before that time. Afterward they were probably supplied constantly till June 23, 1731; when a Fast was appointed for the first Thursday of the following September, preparatory to calling and settling a minister among them. The Fast was duly kept with the assistance of 'some reverend elders,' in the vicinity. On the day following, Mr. Solomon Prentice of Cambridge was called to be their minister.† It was at first voted to give Mr. Prentice for his support, 'Ninety pounds of passable money, or bills of public credit as money now passes from man to man, or as the valuation of money shall be from time to time, or as said money rises and falls.' At a subsequent meeting it was voted to add ten pounds to the ninety. Mr. Prentice accepted the call, and the 29th day of Dec. 1731, was appointed for his ordination. On the day preceding, Dec. 28th, the church was formed.

The following are the names of the persons then gathered into a church, with the places from which they came, and in which most of them had been previously connected with churches. Three, Rev. Solomon Prentice, Samuel Cooper and Benjamin Goddard, were from Cambridge; one, Capt. Benjamin Willard, from Framingham; two, James Whipple, Sen. and Jr., from Ipswich Ham-

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* The tract purchased of the Indians was four miles square. It is now, perhaps, by additions from other towns, about four miles by five. This territory, then not only without church, but almost without white inhabitant, has now a population, as recently ascertained, of about three thousand three hundred and seventy-five, and has seven houses of worship, viz: two Congregational, two Baptist, two Methodist, and one Free Will Baptist.

† Mr. Prentice, it thus appears, was elected and invited by the Proprietors alone. No church had yet been formed. We see therefore that it was not deemed essential, in settling a minister, that he should be called by a church separately from the town or parish.

let; two, Thomas Pratt and Thomas Drury, from Shrewsbury; three, James Leland, Joseph and Simeon Willard, from Sutton; one, Nehemiah Howe, from Sudbury; three, John Collar, Jonathan Hall and Jason Whitney, from Stow; two, Abner Stow and Ephraim Brigham, from Marlborough; one, James Cutler, from Westborough; one, Eleazer Flegg, [Flagg,] from Concord; and one, Samuel Warren, from Weston;—in all twenty. These names stand subscribed to the original covenant. We recognize no *great* names here, at least none which the world has agreed to call great. But let not 'Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile.' There are *good* names here, names, which, though not to be found upon the Scroll of Fame, are written upon a brighter page in the Book of Life; names they are of no mean account in that kingdom, whose least citizen is greater than earth's most illustrious potentate.

The Covenant which they adopted is as follows:

'We, whose names are hereunto subscribed, inhabitants of Hassanamisco, in New England, knowing that we are very prone to offend God, the Most High, both in heart and life, through the prevalency of sin that dwelleth within us, and the manifold temptations from without us, for which we have great reason to be unfeignedly humble before him from day to day,—Do, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, with dependence upon the gracious assistance of his Holy Spirit, solemnly enter into a covenant with God, and one with another, according to God, as follows;—

'First. That having chosen and taken the Lord Jehovah to be our God, we will fear him, cleave to him in love, and serve him in truth, with all our hearts, giving up ourselves to him to be his people, in all things, to be at his direction and sovereign disposal, that we may have and hold communion with him as members of Christ's mystical body, according to his revealed will, to our lives' end.

'Secondly. We also bind ourselves to bring up our children and servants in the knowledge and fear of God, by his instructions according to our best abilities, and in special by the use of Orthodox Catechism[s], that the true religion may be maintained in our families while we live; yea, and among such as shall live when we are dead and gone.

'Thirdly. We furthermore promise to keep close to the truth of Christ, endeavoring with lively affection towards it in our hearts, to

defend it against all opposers thereof, as God shall call us at any time thereunto; which, that we may do, we resolve to use the Holy Scriptures as our Platform whereby we may discern the mind and will of Christ, and not the new-found inventions of men.

'Fourthly. We also engage ourselves to have a careful inspection over our own hearts, so as to endeavor, by virtue of the death of Christ, the mortification of all our sinful passions, worldly frames, and disorderly affections, whereby we may be withdrawn from the living God.

'Fifthly. We moreover oblige ourselves, in the faithful improvement of all our abilities and opportunities, to worship God according to the particular institutions of Christ for his church under Gospel administrations; as to give reverend attention to the word of God, to pray unto him, to sing his praises, and to hold communion one with another, in the use of both the seals, viz; Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

'Sixthly. We likewise promise, that we will peaceably submit unto the holy discipline appointed by Christ in his church for offenders, obeying them that rule over us in the Lord.

'Seventhly. We also bind ourselves to walk in love one toward another, endeavoring our mutual edification, visiting, exhorting, comforting as occasion serveth, and warning any brother or sister which offends, not divulging private offences irregularly, but heedfully following the several precepts laid down by Christ for church dealing, 18th Matt. 16, 17, 18, willingly forgiving all that manifest unto the judgment of charity that they truly repent of all their mismanagements.

'Now the God of peace, which brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make us all perfect in every good work to do his will, working in us that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.'

This Covenant, you perceive, is liberal and unsectarian. In this respect it resembled those generally used in the early Congregational churches of the country. This very Covenant, indeed, was adopted by several other churches in the vicinity afterwards, and probably had been in use elsewhere before it was submitted to this

Church.* It was undoubtedly the covenant of a church whose members were, in most or all points, Calvinistic in sentiment. But it was not framed with the view to prevent them from ever departing from that doctrinal system. It placed no fetters upon the mind, to bind it forever to one man's interpretation of Christian truth. However firmly one or another doctrine of Calvinism may have been held, or however highly valued, it was not deemed necessary to force it upon all men as an unquestionable and essential part of Christianity, nor to make its acceptance a test by which to try the soundness of Christian character to the end of time. It was not then thought improbable that there might be more light to come from the Scripture pages than men had yet seen; and so men were left to see what they could see, while they covenanted to help each other as they might, in the one great solemn interest of life, that of sober, righteous and godly living. They accounted themselves orthodox, to be sure, and their orthodoxy was Calvinism, or something like it. But the orthodoxy of general consent is no fixed, unchangeable thing. The orthodoxy of the Congregational churches in Massachusetts, to-day, is not that of a hundred years ago. This is something which changes with the generations. That which this age determines shall be heresy, may be voted orthodox by the next; while the present orthodoxy may be pronounced heterodox by the same authority. To know how much or little is implied in calling an opinion or a man orthodox, we must consider where, when, and by whom the term is used.

The ordination of Mr. Prentice, as has been observed, took place the day after the formation of the Church. The Pastor elect was a native of Cambridge,† where he was educated, having been grad-

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* It was adopted by the First Church in Sterling in 1744, and by the Northboro' Church in 1746, as we learn from Rev. Mr. Allen's Centennial Discourse; and by the First Church in Worcester, with some slight modifications, making it more doctrinal, in 1746, as we learn from Mr. Lincoln's History of Worcester. Mr. Lincoln, in his excellent work (p. 171), *seems* to attribute the authorship of it to Rev. Messrs. Campbell of Oxford, and Stone of Southboro', on the authority of Rev. Mr. Maccarty. These gentlemen probably brought it forward for the acceptance of that Church, but could hardly have originated it, as it had been long in use before that time.

† He was the son of Solomon Prentice, and was born May 11th, 1705. Camb. Town Records.

uated at Harvard College in the year 1727. Testimonials of his qualifications for the ministry are among the Proprietors' Records, signed by Messrs. Trowbridge of Groton, Appleton of Cambridge, and Parkman of Westborough. Rev. Mr. Parkman introduced the Ordination services with prayer; Rev. Mr. Appleton preached; Rev. Mr. Swift of Framingham made the Ordaining prayer; Rev. Mr. Trowbridge joined in Laying on of Hands, and Rev. Mr. Loring of Sudbury gave the Right hand of Fellowship.

James Whipple and Samuel Cooper were chosen Deacons on the 21st January, 1732, 'by a very great majority.'

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was administered for the first time April 9th, 1732.

No provision seems to have been made for supplying the Communion Table with suitable furniture, till the beginning of the year 1734, when £8 4s. were raised for the purpose from the following sources: Five of the Proprietors living out of Town contributed £1 7s. 6d.; the congregation contributed £2 6s. 6d.; the Rev. Mr. Flynt, of Harvard College, gave £1 10s.* and the Church itself contributed £3. Dea. James Whipple, Eleazer Fletcher and Silas Warren, at different times afterwards, presented vessels to the Church for their use in the ordinances.

The congregation were not then permitted to choose their own seats in the meeting-house, nor to become permanent proprietors of any particular accommodation in it. A Committee was chosen from time to time, to assign seats to the worshippers, 'according to estate and age.' This assignment of seats was called 'seating the meeting-house.' The Indians being entitled to all the privileges of the other inhabitants in regard to public worship, were consulted as to their choice of seats, and were finally appointed to sit on either side of the front door against the walls of the house, the men on one side and the women on the other.

The connection between Mr. Prentice and his people was one of uninterrupted harmony for several years. The men of those days were men of prayer, who cheerfully maintained the institutions of Christianity, murmuring at no sacrifices which were necessary to

* For an interesting account of this early benefactor of the Church, see Pierce's History of Harvard College, 260–264.

secure the ministrations of the word of God. They were a people of few wants and simple habits. Their ministers, like themselves, lived frugally, and usually shared with them to greater or less extent in the labors of husbandry. If there is truth in the lines of the old poet, they were abundantly blessed, scanty as were their worldly endowments:

> 'For gold and grace did never yet agree;
> Religion always sides with poverty.'

An anecdote, which tradition has preserved, gives us a vivid picture of the wildness of the country at this period. Mr. Prentice, it is said, proceeding to meeting on a Sunday morning, observed a bear ranging among the boughs of a chestnut tree not far from the meeting house. Probably thinking it hardly prudent to leave him to go at large, while the congregation were occupied in worship, he returned to his house, and taking his gun, brought down the unwelcome intruder from his retreat; after which he again took his way to the Church, where he undoubtedly led the devotions of the assembly with more concentration and fervor of mind than he could have commanded, if he had suffered the wild beast to roam through the neighborhood in freedom.*

No events of particular importance in the history of the Church, are to be noticed for about ten years after the settlement of the first minister. It was about the year 1740, that the memorable and wide spread religious excitement of the last century began to be strongly felt here. It was in the latter part of that year that Whitefield arrived in Boston. The churches throughout the land were thrown into a state of intense agitation. Rev. Mr. Prentice was one who decidedly favored the movement, and encouraged the measures of the itinerant preachers, whom he invited freely into his pulpit. He became what was termed at that time a 'New Light,' a title, the origin and precise significance of which we are not sure that we know; but we have supposed that it referred to that inner light or perception, which some of the more extravagant of the revivalists claimed to possess, and to the guidance of which they trusted with scarcely less confidence than to the light of Scripture.‡ Whitefield is said

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* See Appendix, C.

† Many who were then known as belonging to the 'New Light' party, afterwards, we are told, went to make up a set of strange fanatics called 'Live-for-

to have preached here one or more times, though not, as we can learn, with any very extraordinary effect. On the 16th of May, 1742, Rev. Philemon Robbins of Branford, Conn., a man who was actively engaged, both at home and abroad, in promoting the excitement, preached here, when twenty or more persons are reported to have fallen down with distress and anguish.* Ezekiel Coal (or Cole), a member of this Church and an Indian, Solomon Paine, Elihu Marsh, and others, who had been ordained as lay preachers or exhorters, also came among the people at this period and preached.

The course of the Pastor was not approved by all the Church. By the beginning of the year 1743, a disaffection had sprung up which continued to work till it resulted in Mr. Prentice's dismission. Seven members at first withdrew from the communion.† This led to discipline and discord. Meetings of the Church were held without effect. Council upon council was called with no better results. Neither party were satisfied nor conciliated. After many difficulties which we have neither the time nor inclination to detail, a council was at last agreed on, which met on the 2d of October, 1744. It closed its session on the 11th. The 'Result' was printed by the aggrieved brethren, a circumstance which shows that it was regarded as rather favorable to themselves than to their pastor. It is an interesting document, as showing some of the extravagances into which even sincere and well-meaning Christians are liable to fall in seasons of high excitement, when the passions over-ride the reason, and as illustrating some of the peculiar absurdities which were not rare at that period. It shows also that Mr. Prentice had gone so far as to lose, in a measure at least, the confidence of his ministerial brethren of the neighborhood, as a prudent and discreet minister.

Among the doctrines which he was charged with preaching, were

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evers,' who had their head quarters hereabouts, and professed to believe that they should live an endless life on earth. After this bubble of delusion burst, the same elements, as was natural, entered into a third combination, and flourished for a while as Shakers.

* Rev. Mr. Parkman's Journal, in Tracy's 'Great Awakening,' p. 207.

† These seven were Thomas Axtell, Thomas Drury, John Ward, Aaron Hardy, Israel Stevens, Jason Whitney and Simon Taintor. It appears before the 9th of January, 1743, 'they had for some time withdrawn from the communion.' Some of them afterwards went so far as to sign another covenant.

such as these:—that we 'are to love none but such as are savingly converted;'—that the 'life and practice are the negative part' of Christianity;—that a converted man might know others, whether they were converted or not, by conversing with them;—that he might in fact, 'give a near guess, if they held their tongues.' The council judged that he had gone too far in his language on these points.

Another charge was, that he had said that 'some ministers would advise some persons in distress to prayer, which he said was abominable.' Referring to the remark of another, 'that prayer is as fatal to the soul as rats-bane is to the body,' he was said to have added, 'I leave that, but I say it is abominable! abominable!' This doctrine the council pronounced unsound and of dangerous tendency.

Another charge was, that he had said that 'the Court of Heaven was adjourned for a little space, till one of the members came down to take upon him humanity.' These expressions were condemned as untrue, and as 'discovering a want of sound knowledge, and implying a variety of absurd notions.'

It was complained that in one of his sermons he had said that 'persons would follow their unconverted ministers, till they come to hell.' It was one of the doctrines broached and much insisted on during this religious agitation, that those who were truly converted must not only certainly know it, but that they had the power of discerning with hardly less than certainty, whether or not others were converted, and nothing was more common among the over-heated zealots of that day, than the pronunciation of wholesale condemnation against the ministers of the land, multitudes of whom were denounced as unconverted men. Mr. Prentice was thought by the council to have countenanced these hard and uncharitable judgments too much.

One other charge against the doctrines he preached was, that he had said, 'to what purpose is it to preach to an unregenerate man,' * * * 'to tell him he must not kill, must not steal, must not do these and those things? for he has no power to resist them; for he is the Devil's slave and vassal, and doeth just what the Devil would have him do.' This was considered by the council as 'carrying the matter too far.'

The introduction of uneducated exhorters and itinerants into his pulpit, and the obtrusion of himself into the charges of other ministers without their consent, were also charges preferred against him. The council judged it condemnable and entreated him to guard against such a course in future.

Other complaints were brought against the preaching of Mr. Prentice, in which the council thought it proper to condemn him in part, and caution him for the future. Nothing was urged against him affecting his moral character.

The council exhorted the aggrieved brethren to bury all past dissatisfaction, and to sit contentedly and peaceably under his ministrations, if he should accept their judgment and advice.

We might suspect from the censures laid upon Mr. Prentice by this council, that the men who composed it were unfriendly to him or to the revival. But this suspicion is forbidden by the fact that it was a *mutual* council. And we find the names of a majority of the clerical members, associated with that of Mr. Prentice himself, in a document issued the previous year from an assembly of ministers met in Boston, bearing testimony to the genuineness of 'the late revival of religion.'*

There can be no doubt that he was one of the most zealous favorers of the extraordinary means which were employed to produce the tempest of religious emotion which swept over the whole country. His honesty and conscientiousness are not to be doubted for a moment—his discretion may be. Some good probably came of his measures; but that much evil accompanied it there can be no question. If there was a revival of religion here, there was a revival of some things else which were not so good. The excitement bore some fruits which are not to be recognized as Christian fruits.

The result of the council was accepted by both parties, but evidently with little heartiness on the part of the pastor. Indeed he declared to the church that he felt 'very much hurt and pressed by it;' but 'as he had submitted matters of controversy to the council,' he acquiesced in their judgment, 'so far as he could and not infringe upon his conscience.'

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* Appendix, D.

There was but a temporary quiet enjoyed by the church after this adjustment of its difficulties. There had been no real reconciliation. In the early part of 1746 the disaffection broke out anew.* Mr. Prentice was charged with not having followed the advice of the council in all particulars. He replied that he never intended to in every particular, as he must violate his own conscience if he did so. Church meetings were resumed; council followed council as before; but all to no purpose. The advice of the counsellors was in each case voted accepted by all, and then followed by none. The Church continued in this distracted state till Mr. Prentice at last 'signified that he was discouraged in his station,' and was willing to receive a dismission. A council was accordingly called, by whose advice he was dismissed, July 10th, 1747.

In a communication which he made to this council, he alludes most touchingly to his trials and perplexities, exhibiting a deep and tender interest in the flock of his charge, and expressing his desire to continue in the sacred office of the ministry, 'if it might be for the glory of God, and the spiritual good of His church and people.' It breathes throughout the spirit of the devoted Christian pastor, who desires to live only for his Master's great work; and whatever errors of doctrine or practice he may have fallen into in the administration of religious truth, none, who read his feeling lamentations over the sad dissensions in the church, and his humble account of his own labors, can fail to be impressed with the belief, that he was a 'man of God,' pure in heart, and of true piety. Whatever may have been his errors, their root was not in the heart.

After the dissolution of his connection with this people, he went to Easton, in Bristol County, where he was installed pastor of the First Congregational Church in that town on the 2d of November, 1747. He remained there about seven years, and near the close of those seven years, his opinions having undergone some change, he is said to have proposed that his Church should join the Presbyterians. Some favored it, but a majority refused. He notwithstanding

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* The length to which it had gone may be inferred from the following entry made by the pastor upon the records: 'May 4, 1746, Sac't of the Lord's Supper administered here. Many, viz. sixty, absent.'

joined them as a minister, and had one or more meetings of the Presbytery at his house. For some cause not known, the Presbytery in 1754 suspended him temporarily from his ministry. This cut him off from the support of the parish and the means of living, and he soon left the place and returned to Grafton. He continued to preach in different places till near the close of his life. He died in this town May 22, 1773, aged sixty-eight.

Mr. Prentice erected a house, in which he lived while minister of the town, upon or near the spot now occupied by the house of Hon. Samuel Wood.

Mr. Joseph Merriam was chosen the third deacon of the Church in 1742.

It was nearly three years after Mr. Prentice was dismissed before another minister was settled. During this interval, in 1749, the Church voted to take the Cambridge Platform as their rule of Church discipline 'in the main things or articles therein contained.' They took it only 'in so far as they thought it to be supported by and grounded on the express word of God.' 'As to other things that might be looked on as expedients for the well-ordering of a church,' they adopted it as their '*general*' rule.*

Rev. Aaron Hutchinson, from Hebron, Ct., was ordained the second pastor of this church, June 6, 1750.† Rev. Mr. Martyn, of Westborough, [now Northboro',] made the first prayer. The Rev. Mr. Pumroy, of Hebron, preached the sermon from Acts xx. 28. The Rev. Mr. Loring, of Sudbury, gave the charge, and Rev. Mr. Parkman, of Westborough, the right hand of Fellowship. The Rev. Mr. Hall, of Sutton, joined in laying on of hands, and made

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* The attempt seems to have been made at a later day to bring the Church under a more stringent application of the Cambridge Platform, but without success. The question, as it came before the Church, seems to have been, 'whether the church do now adhere to the Cambridge Platform, *as a full and just system* for church Rule and discipline, *as being full well proved and supported by the word of God in each and every part and paragraph therein contained.*' The words *italicised* are partially erased. The vote as passed was, 'to adhere to it as a good plan of church rule and discipline.' We may also infer that this church practised a less rigorous discipline than some of the neighboring churches, from the fact that one of its members in regular standing was refused admittance to a church in an adjoining town, because of his unwillingness to sign their articles of discipline.

† Appendix, E.

the last prayer. Rev. Mr. Stone, of Southborough, and Mr. Maccarty, of Worcester, 'consented and helped by their voice.'

Mr. Hutchinson remained in the ministry here till Nov. 18, 1772, when he was dismissed by the church, (though not by the town,) having been the pastor a little more than twenty-two years. The condition of the church during his connection with it seems to have been for the most part peaceful and prosperous. He was a man of strong natural powers of mind, and was considered a learned man and a good classical scholar by his contemporaries. Soon after his settlement the covenant was so altered as to recognize the doctrine of the Trinity, and to require the scriptures to be understood 'in that view as exhibited to us in the well known Westminster Catechism.' It was the hand of Mr. Hutchinson that interlined these alterations of the covenant, and it was doubtless his counsel that led to their adoption. In his theology he was severe and somewhat dogmatical. Being called in the year 1767 to Newbury, to sit on an ecclesiastical council which was convened by some disaffected members of the First Church in that place, a Sabbath passed during the time the council was in session, and Mr. Hutchinson preached by invitation at Newburyport. His sermon was published, and led to a protracted controversy. Rev. John Tucker, (afterwards Dr.,) minister of the First Parish in Newbury, was of Arminian sentiments—sentiments which were then entertained by a considerable number of the clergy of New-England. It was his supposed heresy which called together the council of which Mr. Hutchinson was a member. The sermon that he preached was aimed at this defection from Calvin, and those preachers who countenanced it. It was entitled 'Valour for the Truth.'* The main doctrine which it seeks to establish, is that of original and imputed sin, which he carries out to its full and legitimate results, by urging that infants are exposed to damnation and eternal misery. He opposes the notion that infants are innocent, with argument, satire and ridicule, declaring that they are 'sinners, guilty and polluted, or they cannot be saved in any way pointed out in our Bible.' This odious doctrine, now abandoned by many Calvinists of New-England, Mr. Hutchinson propounded and maintained in all its offen-

*Text—Jer. IX, 3—'But they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth.'

sive baldness, without any attempt at softening or palliation; dealing ever and anon, as he went along, side blows at those preachers whose teaching conformed not to his doctrine, and almost as often at those '*Neuters*,' as he termed them, 'who hide their principles, hover in the dark, and whose trumpet gives an uncertain sound.' If he has little patience with those who deny his cherished dogmas, he has less with those who say nothing about them, or hold them by halves. Mr. Tucker reviewed his sermon, and pamphlets followed from both sides. Mr. Hutchinson found he had encountered no contemptible antagonist. He was opposed with a set of weapons different from his own, but not less effective. He was a son of thunder, strong, bold and impetuous. His opponent was quick-eyed, practised and self-possessed. The skill of the disputants, and the lively interest taken in the questions under discussion by the religious world at that period, gave considerable celebrity to the controversy.

Mr. Hutchinson was distinguished for an extraordinary memory. The tradition is familiar to you, that he considered himself capable of re-writing the New Testament if it should be lost. There are those now living among us, who remember to have seen him enter the pulpit and go through the whole service without opening a book of any kind. He appointed his hymns and recited them, as well as passages of scripture, with entire confidence in his memory, and without mistake.

The church records throw no light upon the causes of Mr. Hutchinson's dismission from his people. They barely state the fact of his dismission, showing that the proposition to separate came from himself. Difficulties are hinted at, but neither stated nor explained. We find in the town records, that when it was voted, in 1771, to pay Mr. Hutchinson his salary as usual, fifteen persons entered their dissent from that vote, on the ground that he had 'forfeited his salary by his irregular conduct, as had been proved before an ecclesiastical council, he having been found guilty of dissimulation, hypocrisy and violation of truth.' But the charges of these fifteen dissenters bear strong marks of being dictated by feelings of personal unfriendliness; for it is not probable that if such flagrant misconduct had been clearly proven to the satisfaction of the unprejudiced, the number of dissenters would have been so small, nor that the town

would have refused to dismiss Mr. Hutchinson when a council advised it. Neither can we suppose that the church would have recommended him to the fellowship of a sister church, as they did, if they had believed that such charges against his moral character could be substantiated. The town refused to accept the result of the council which advised Mr. Hutchinson's dismissal in 1771, and voted not to release him. And when the question came up a year after, whether they would concur with the church's vote in dismissing him, they refused to concur. It appears that he had not become generally unacceptable to the people; and that the town never did by vote consent to his dismission. Many were dissatisfied that the church should act in the matter without the concurrence of the town, and when afterwards the town was asked to unite with the church in calling another minister, one man, Mr. Abraham Temple, objected to any such proceeding being had on the ground that 'the church had not informed the town what is become of their old minister.' The church, however, expressly disclaimed the intention of abridging the rights of the town, or of assuming the power to settle or dismiss a minister without the town's consent. It is probable that Mr. Hutchinson, finding that his presence was the cause of dissension, chose to retire without waiting for the town to agree to his departure. The termination of his pastoral relation to his people, we are inclined to believe, was occasioned more by some offensive eccentricities in his social habits, than by any defect of moral character, or disqualifications as a teacher of religion. He was without grace or polish in his manners, and his freedom, though he probably was not conscious of it himself, must often have verged upon rudeness. This trait might naturally produce in some minds, after a time, a degree of coolness, and even aversion. And a breach being once made, it is not difficult to conceive that it should gradually increase till it ended in an open rupture. *

The house which stands a few feet south of the 'Evangelical Congregational' church, was built and occupied by Mr. Hutchinson.

He died, at an advanced age, in Vermont. He graduated at Yale College in 1747, and was honored with the degree of Master of Arts from Harvard and Dartmouth Colleges. Several of his sermons were published. Those which we have seen bear the same characteristics on which we have remarked at some length in one

* Some farther light is shed upon the causes of Mr. Hutchinson's Dismission in the Massachusetts Spy," of the dates, Dec. 31, 1772 & Jan. 14, 1773.

of them. He was confident in his opinions and strong in maintaining them. He pressed his views vigorously and forcibly upon his hearers, and probably carried them with him generally to his own conclusions. He must have been a preacher of much more than common power and influence.*

Abner Stow was elected the fourth Deacon of this Church in 1750, and Joseph Batcheller the fifth in 1765.

In the year 1770, Watts's version of the Psalms, 'together with his scripture hymns in the first and third books,' came into use as a collection of hymns for public worship.'† Previous to this the New England version had been in use, and the change to a new book was here, as generally elsewhere, attended with no little difficulty and opposition. It was about the same time that the church relinquished to selected choristers the authority to appoint the tunes which should be sung in church; though not without a reservation, which required all but the tune after the last prayer to be 'such tunes as have been usual of late, and such old tunes as upon tryal may be thought proper for the public worship.' The first persons chosen choristers were Jonathan Stow and Moses Harrington.

After Mr. Hutchinson's dismission the church was without a pastor till Oct. 19, 1774, when Mr. Daniel Grosvenor, from Pomfret, Conn., was ordained the third minister of the town.

In the ordaining services, the Rev. Aaron Putnam, Pastor of the first church in Pomfret, began with prayer; the Rev. Ebenezer Grosvenor, preached from Gen. 45 : 24 ;‡ the Rev. Elisha Fish, of Upton, prayed before the charge; and Rev. David Ripley, of the third church in Pomfret, (now Abington,) and the Rev. Joseph Sumner, of Shrewsbury, joined in laying on hands; the Rev. David Hall, of Sutton, gave the charge; the Rev. Amariah Frost, of the second church in Mendon, (now Milford,) gave the right hand of

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* See Appendix, F.

† I do not find in the Church records any intimation of the reasons for which the *second* book was rejected. Mr. Brigham, in his valuable Centennial Address, ascribes it to its 'supposed unscriptural character.'

‡ The preacher was an older brother of the pastor elect, at that time minister of Scituate, afterwards settled at Harvard. His sermon was printed. His text, 'See that ye fall not by the way,' gave him occasion to point out the sources both in minister and people, from which fallings out usually come. Its council was judicious and well-timed.

Fellowship; and the Rev. Josiah Whitney, of the second church in Pomfret, (now Brooklyn,) made the last prayer.

Mr. Grosvenor continued in the ministry here till the close of the year 1787, when he was dismissed at his own request, having lost his voice. He had never constant and firm health, and was obliged occasionally to suspend his pulpit labors for a while, before the failure of his voice entirely disabled him. The success of his ministerial labors here is best attested by the unwillingness of his people to consent to his removal, so long as they saw any reason to hope that he would be able to resume his labors. He was a man of very pleasing manners, both in the pulpit and out of it, dignified in his bearing, courteous and engaging in his address. Rare conversational powers, united with these qualities, made him everywhere a pleasant companion. His fondness of anecdote, ready wit and plentiful resources, also served to make his presence always welcome to those who loved society. In his doctrines he was said to be moderate, avoiding all extremes; and as his manner of speaking was easy, fluent and vivacious, his attractions as a preacher were much more than ordinary. The years of his ministry embraced the period of our Revolutionary struggle, in which crisis he evinced his attachment to the cause of his country by 'leaving his pulpit, taking his musket and joining the company of minute men that went to Cambridge on the 19th of April.'*

The church was united and peaceful during his ministry, and consented with reluctance to his dismission.

Mr. Grosvenor, having recovered his voice, was settled again in Paxton on the 5th of Nov. 1794, where he remained eight years. He resigned his charge there on the 17th of Nov. 1802,† and spent the latter years of his life at Petersham. He was born in Pomfret, Ct., in 1749, graduated at Yale College in 1769, and died at Petersham, July 22, 1834, aged eighty-four years. His grave is made in my native village. His white locks and venerable appearance I remember well, having often looked upon them with respect in my childhood.

After Mr. Grosvenor's resignation the church remained destitute

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* Brigham's Centennial Address, p. 29.

† Worcester Magazine, II, 240.

of a pastor nearly nine years. The records made during this time are meagre, and contain little matter of interest.

In 1790, Joseph Merriam, Jr. and Jonathan Stow were chosen deacons.

The same year Mr. Nathaniel Howe was invited to become the minister of the town, but declined the invitation.

Rev. Mr. Grosvenor was succeeded by Mr. John Miles, a native of Westminster and graduate of Brown University, R. I., who was ordained the fourth pastor of the church, Oct. 12th, 1796. We here come to a period in the history of which some now living bore a part. We shall pass on rapidly to a conclusion, noting only a few important facts which deserve a somewhat particular mention.

Rev. Mr. Miles's ministry continued thirty years. He was dismissed on the 7th of September, 1826, with expressions of respect and affection from his people, and with a recommendation from an ecclesiastical council as a worthy minister of Jesus Christ.

The same day, Mr. Moses C. Searle was ordained his successor.

In 1810, Timothy Merriam and Nathaniel Adams were elected deacons. Albert Stone was elected to the same office in 1820, Joseph Merriam in 1824,* Holland Greenwood in 1831, and Otis Prince in 1832.

In April, 1827, the expediency of establishing a Sabbath School was considered by the church, and it was voted to make the 'attempt.' The attempt succeeded.

Soon after the settlement of Mr. Searle, it became the policy of the pastor and church to insist more strenuously than had been usual upon doctrinal qualifications, as conditions of admission to the fellowship of the church. It was voted that persons coming from other churches with certificates of dismission and recommendation, 'should be examined before the church as was customary in the case of those who come forward the first time to make profession of religion.' In 1828, the covenant was revised and altered in such a manner as to give it a more sectarian aspect, and a creed of many articles was appended to it, apparently for the same purpose. The ancient and catholic foundation upon which the church was reared,

* Three Joseph Merriams of three successive generations have held this office in the church.

was at last swept away, and the narrow platform of a party was substituted for it. The consequence of this prescription of the creed of a sect was, of course, that none but persons of that sect could gain admission to the church, or participate in those ordinances which the Saviour has enjoined upon his followers. The presence of sectarian tests in the covenant had, indeed, since its alteration in 1750, kept all but the adherents of the Westminster Catechism without its pale. Faith, humility, prayer, a devout walk and conversation, had ceased to be sufficient criteria of Christian discipleship, and conditions of Christian communion. The majority of the congregation had risen, as *they* believed, to a juster apprehension of religious truth. They had ceased to believe in some of the doctrines which their fathers had held, and felt that they were not edified by hearing them still presented as the very essence of Christianity. But none of them, however accordant their lives and spirits with the teaching and example of Jesus, could be members of this church. Though they might be of those of whom Jesus said, they are ' my brother and sister and mother,' though the Bible alone was their creed and the rule of their living, they were not admitted to the fellowship of this church, which received to its communion only those who would take in addition to the Bible a creed to limit it.

It was no strange thing, therefore, that when the majority of the Society chose to dismiss a minister, whose teaching seemed to them neither true nor profitable, they should part company with a church, every member of which stood committed to a doctrinal system which they rejected as human in its origin, and unscriptural in its character.

Such was the case. This society, at a meeting held on the third of December, 1831, voted to dismiss Rev. Mr. Searle. The members of the church, who of course could have been only such as embraced the same opinions that their pastor held, since such only were allowed in the creed, soon seceded, and with others organized a new society with which they voted as a church to connect themselves. They took the name of the ' Evangelical Congregational Church and Society.'

All the members of the church having left the Society, there was now no obstacle to the re-formation of a church within the bosom of the Society.

This was accordingly done. On Sunday, Aug. 5, 1832, a church ' was regularly gathered from the Congregational Society, called the Congregational Church;' as such it is known to the laws of the land, it being considered the successor to the original church connected with this Society. Nineteen persons covenanted together as members. The venerable Dr. Bancroft, of Worcester, and Rev. Edward B. Hall, now of Providence, R. I., who was then preaching to the Society, conducted the services of the occasion. The covenant which was adopted is as follows:

" Being desirous of obeying the precepts and enjoying the privileges of the Christian Religion, and aiding each other in the discharge of its duties, we do, by this covenant, unite in a Christian church, to walk together in the faith and order of the Gospel, giving the following expressions of our individual belief and desire:—

" I believe in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the word of God and receive them as the proper and only rule of faith and duty. I believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, ' exalted to be a Prince and Saviour,' the ' Mediator between God and man,' ' the way, the truth and the life.' On his religion I rest my hopes of salvation. His precepts I wish to obey. And I now unite myself to His church, to commemorate His love in the ordinance which He instituted and gave to His disciples.

" I do this as an expression of my firm belief in the divinity of His religion, and my earnest desire and solemn purpose to live as His disciple, humbly hoping through the grace of God to become an heir of salvation."

Isaac W. Wood was chosen deacon of the church, Aug. 9th, 1832. Mr. Rufus A. Johnson was ordained its pastor in 1833, and dismissed in 1838. He was succeeded by Rev. Cazneau Palfrey, who continued in the same office till the spring of 1843.

I have thus followed the history of this church down to a recent period, since which its history is known to you all. I do not feel at liberty to detain you with the reflections which my theme has been so fruitful in suggesting. Many a text for profitable lessons have we left unheeded in reviewing these chronicles of the past. I only wait now to enjoin it upon you (as I do also upon myself,) to cherish in remembrance the virtues of the fathers. And, while we venerate their names, and admire the heroic constancy and entire-

ness of their allegiance to the Kingdom of Christ, may we do better than admire, may we imitate. May we learn to venerate, even more than themselves, the truth that made them what they were. We are not the sons of our fathers, if we look to any other than Jesus as the Author and FINISHER of our faith. We are not their children, if we make even themselves our chief teachers. They 'charge us before God and his blessed angels that we follow the Lord Jesus Christ.' They charge us not to 'come to a period in religion,' but to have our eyes ever directed to the 'written word,' expectant of increasing light. We are not of them, if we remain fast fixed at the point which they last left. If we would be to our age and to them, what they were to their age and their forefathers, we must be advancing from their position, looking higher and getting forward, lingering not in lazy contentment with any present acquirements. Above all, if we would make good a claim to their kindred, we must cherish those Christian principles and affections which they prized above all knowledge. Their self-renunciation, their sustaining and unquenchable faith in the paternal providence of God, their unintermitting and martyr-like devotion as Christian disciples, their steadfast adhesion to the cause of Christianity and the interests of the church, these are the marked features in their characters. Take these away, and you take away the traits that distinguish them from their generation. And in so far as these are wanting in us, we want the qualities which alone can render us worthy of them.

APPENDIX.

A.—PAGE 3.

A secession from the Congregational Society took place in 1832, on account of differences in matters of faith. The minority that withdrew comprised the church. The records and furniture of the church were removed by them. They were asked to return these to the Congregational Church, but refused. This church, although believing that they needed only to insist upon the restoration of this property to recover it, were disinclined to prosecute their claims by litigation. The matter rested till near the close of the year 1845, when it was again taken into consideration by the church. It was then voted to choose a committee to communicate with the Evangelical Congregational Church on the subject. This led to the following correspondence:

'GRAFTON, JAN. 20, 1846.

'TO THE EVANGELICAL CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH IN GRAFTON: CHRISTIAN BRETHREN AND FRIENDS:—

'At a recent meeting of the Congregational Church in said Grafton, we were appointed a committee to address a communication to you respecting certain records of the Congregational Church supposed to be now in your possession and subject to your control. In obedience to our in-

structions, we proceed to lay the matter with which we are charged before you.

'You are aware that in the year of our Lord 1832, a part of the Congregational Society, and all of the members but one* of the church connected with the Society, seceded from that parish. You are aware that the seceding members of the church took with them in their removal all the records of the Congregational Church, which had been made up to the time of their secession. You are aware that a demand of those records was soon after made by a deacon of the Congregational Church, upon one who *had been* its deacon, but who had seceded from the Congregational Society, and that that demand was not complied with.

'These records we consider ever to have been, and still to be, legally and rightfully the property of the Congregational Church,—by which we mean the church connected with the Congregational Society. This church has forborne hitherto to press its claim to this property to the utmost by bringing the matter before a legal tribunal. It has forborne to do this, not from any doubt of the validity of its claim, nor any doubt as to what the decision of such a tribunal would be; for we suppose there can be no question that the law, as it has been uniformly expounded in our Courts, would award these records to the church connected with the Congregational Society. But we have been unwilling to provoke dissension or bitterness of feeling. We have suffered what we have deemed our rights to be long withheld from us, from reluctance to exact them at the expense of peace. It is repugnant to our minds as Christians, to present to the community the spectacle of two Christian churches resorting to litigation to settle their differences. We are still, as we have always been, solicitous to avoid giving any cause of acrimonious or unfriendly feelings. In that spirit we now address you, and, as we are authorized to do, submit to your consideration the following proposals:

* The records of the church being beyond the reach of this committee at the time their letter was written, they may be pardoned a slight mistake in supposing that one member was left behind by the seceding church, when in fact the one member who did not withdraw in their company had been excommunicated, *as a step preliminary* to their secession. The excision of this member took place after the *actual* separation of the church from the society, though before the *formal* dissolution of the connection.

'First. We respectfully ask you to surrender to us the records of the Congregational Church before referred to;—because we regard the church now connected with the Congregational Society as the true Congregational Church, and the rightful possessor of the same.

'Such a request has once been refused. It may be again. We are therefore willing in the spirit of compromise and concession to make other propositions. We do not forget—although it does not affect the question of rights—that the seceders from the Congregational Society embraced almost the entire church. We consider that it is possible you may have incorporated the records of your own church with those of the Congregational Church in the same volume, so that you cannot give up the latter without the loss of the former. We consent then, for the sake of peace, and to relieve you from any inconvenience or embarrassment, to relinquish altogether our claim to the said records upon either of the following conditions, viz.: that you will furnish us with a complete copy of them, giving us the privilege of comparing it with the original; or, that you will allow us to take the original records, and keep them for such length of time as shall be sufficient for making a copy of them, we pledging ourselves that they shall be safely returned to your possession when copied.

'In making these proposals we conceive that we ask nothing which is not clearly reasonable and just. In thus offering to yield that to which we consider ourselves fully entitled, we desire to evince the sincerity of our wish for harmony and peace. That which we ask, can be, we are sure, no loss to you, though it will be of great value to us.

'Wishing you all spiritual blessings in Christ, we subscribe ourselves,

ISAAC W. WOOD,
CHARLES BRIGHAM, JR., } COMMITTEE.'
HILLEL BAKER,

'GRAFTON, FEB. 10, 1846.

'TO MESSRS. ISAAC W. WOOD, CHARLES BRIGHAM, JR., AND HILLEL BAKER.

GENTLEMEN :—

'Your communication of Jan. 20th, relative to the Records of the Evangelical Congregational Church, was laid before said church at their preparatory lecture on Friday last; whereupon, after consultation, without expressing their views as to their right to the Records, it *was voted* to accede to your last proposition made in your communication, and loan you the first two volumes of the Records, one at a time, and furnish you with a copy of what is contained in the third volume up to the time of the separation of the church from the Congregational Society; and that you have opportunity of comparing it with the original if desired. At the same time we were chosen a Committee to communicate to you the above proceedings.

'The Records are with our Pastor who will deliver them to an authorized agent.

'With sincere regard,
We are, Gentlemen, Yours,

OTIS ADAMS,
HOLLAND GREENWOOD,
OLIVER M. BRIGHAM,
} COMMITTEE.'

We withhold comment on these letters, preferring to leave it with each candid reader to make his own.

As to the *legality* of our claim to these church books and other property, we believe it is generally admitted by those who retain them. As to the *rightcousness* of it, although we are satisfied, after carefully examining the grounds upon which the law is based, that it is just, still, let it be allowed that there is room for honest difference of opinion as to the justness of the law, or the soundness of its interpretation,—yet, we would ask,—may Christians innocently put at naught, *in a question of property*, any law whenev-

er they feel it burdensome to themselves? Is an interested party competent to set aside the operation of a statute, whenever, *in his opinion*, it fails to secure to him his own rights?

B.—PAGE 4.

Since this Sermon was prepared we have obtained more definite information respecting the first Baptist church gathered here. From the scanty records of that church which have been preserved, and from the private records kept by one of its founders, I learn the following facts.

Preachers of the Baptist denomination began to visit Grafton and hold meetings here at least as early as 1758. Samuel Hovey, of Mendon, preached here several times that year. But it was not till June 17, 1767, that a church was gathered. At that time a council met, 'consisting of Elder Alden's church in Bellingham, and Elder Backus's in Middleborough, when a Baptist church was regularly formed.' Four persons, Joseph Whipple, Jacob Whipple, Ebenezer Wheeler and Robert Leathe [Lathe] were dismissed from a Baptist church in Leicester to join this. Mr. Wheeler, and probably the others, had previously been accustomed to attend worship at Leicester, twelve or fourteen miles distant. The number originally gathered into this church we do not know, but it must have been small, for it was some time before they were able to have a preacher statedly with them. In the year 1773, it was 'voted to get Elder Winchester to preach,' which was accordingly done. But two years after they were destitute, 'having no under Shepherd.' At this time, Sept., 1775, there were 'about twenty-eight living members.' They had no regular place of worship, but met from house to house, a few Sabbaths at a place. In March, 1779, it was 'voted to get Elder Eustick to preach.' He remained with them more than three years. In Oct., 1784, an 'Elder Ingalls' was here,

whose name we find subscribed to records as late as March 19, 1786. As early as the spring of 1784, and probably some years earlier, they had a meeting-house, which stood at the junction of the roads leading from Farnumsville and Saundersville to the centre of the town. The latest entry made in the record-book is dated June 10, 1787. The church probably did not continue in existence long after. Rev. Mr. Whitney, of Northboro', when he wrote his history of the County, in 1793, says there was neither minister nor church of the Baptist denomination in the town, ' and very few anabaptist families.'

The present ' First Baptist Church' was formed, we are told, in 1800.

C.—PAGE 15.

This anecdote occasions us no qualms of conscience on our own behalf, but we are almost surprised, we confess, that neither Mr. Prentice nor his parishoners should have had any scruples as to the propriety of his act, in those days of punctilious sabbath-keeping. Had it been a question of a few rows of corn, or a sheep or two, we cannot think the minister would have turned from his walk to the meeting-house. But the apprehension that might be felt for the safety of children, or other unprotected persons in the settlement, would perhaps justify it to the most exact.

It seems to us more in keeping with the spirit of the age, that ' Brother Ezekiel Cole' should have ' come before the church,' as the records say he did, on the 13th of Feb., 1743, ' and acknowledged his fault for going a gunning on the public thanksgiving day appointed for the King's deliverance in the late battle on the river Mayne in Germany.'

D.—PAGE 19.

The following seven churches were represented in this council. The third church in Ipswich, then called Ipswich Hamlet, now the town of Hamilton. Samuel Wigglesworth, its pastor, was Moderator of the council. The First Church in Mendon, Joseph Dorr, Pastor ; the Second Church in Mendon, now Milford, Amariah Frost, Pastor ; the Church in Medford, Ebenezer Turell, Pastor; the First Church in Malden, Joseph Emerson, Pastor ; the First Church in Reading, William Hobby, Pastor ; the Third Church in Salem. We are informed that there was no church in Salem designated as the Third at the time this council was convened. But that which afterwards took the style of the Third Church had for its Pastor, at that time, Samuel Fisk. It is that which is now called the Tabernacle Church.

E.—PAGE 21.

Mr. Hutchinson's salary was four hundred Pounds, Old Tenor, 'during his continuing regular in the pastoral office in said Grafton.' These four hundred Pounds were to be paid when the following commodities were marketable at the following prices, 'and to rise and fall in proportion as the several necessaries of life herein mentioned are generally bought and sold.'

		£	s.	d.		
'Wheat	at	2	0	0	the Bushel.	OLD TENOR.'
Rye	"	1	10	0	" "	
Ind. Corn	"	1	0	0	" "	
Pork	"	0	2	0	the Pound.	
Beef	"	0	1	0	" "	

F.—PAGE 25.

Mr. Hutchinson not only united in himself the clergyman and farmer, after the common custom of his time, but combined with his clerical and agricultural pursuits, the office of teacher. Well authenticated tradition has handed down to us the ingenious expedient by which he managed so to economise time as to meet his multifarious engagements. His method was to teach Latin and Greek, and probably other branches, as he wrought in the field, his pupils being required to follow him as he followed the plough. His classical attainments and strong memory enabled him thus to cultivate mind and mould at the same time. Both soils, we doubt not, were well tilled, though we may innocently conjecture that the master at the plough handle would now and then be guilty of an ungrammatical apocope, as the share was caught with frequent jerks among the roots and rocks of the rough new country. None but an accomplished linguist, we are sure, could under such circumstances, have administered Greek to the student, and English to the cattle, in due proportion and proper order, without confusion.

The following list of sermons we find in the catalogue of the American Antiquarian Society's Library, preached by Mr. Hutchinson. It is hardly probable that this is a complete list of his published discourses.

'Valour for the Truth, a Sermon preached at Newburyport, Mass., April 27, 1767, 8vo. Boston, 1767.'

'Sermon at Grafton, Mass., Oct. 23, 1768, 8vo. Boston, 1769.' (This was a sermon preached the Sabbath after the Execution of Arthur, at Worcester.)

'Two Sermons at Grafton, Nov. 15, 1772, 8vo. Boston, 1773.' (His last sermons to his congregation in Grafton.)

'Sermon at Northbridge, Mass., Nov. 29, 1772, 8vo. Boston, 1773.'

'Sermon at Pelham, Mass., Dec. 23, 1773, 8vo. Boston.'

Since this Sermon was prepared we have been kindly furnished with some additional particulars respecting Mr. H., by his only surviving son, Hon. Titus Hutchinson, of Woodstock, Vt.

Mr. H. was born in Hebron, Ct.;—that is, within what *was* Hebron at the time of his birth. After he was dismissed from his pastoral charge here, he supplied pulpits in the neighborhood for some time. In the spring of 1775, he purchased a farm in Pomfret, Vt., and made a contract to supply the towns of Pomfret, Woodstock and Hartford, each a third part of the time for five years. On this farm, to which he removed in 1776, he remained till his death, which took place in Sept. 1800, he having reached the age of seventy-six and a half years. He continued to preach in various places while he lived, often to destitute parishes without receiving or asking any compensation. 'In his long ministerial life he was never prevented from preaching by ill health but two Sabbaths, and one of them was the last Sabbath before he died.'

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